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EMPLOYMENT OF PHYSICALLY HANDICAPPED WORKERS

DURING THE WAR

Simple arithmetic during the war overcame to a large extent the mental blockade that many employers had against hiring handicapped workers. The manpower shortages created by the war forced a sharp rise in the number of physically disabled workers in the Nation's labor pool. There simply weren't enough able-bodied men and women to accommodate both the armed forces and industry.

Industry therefore had to tap the large reservoir of manpower among the handicapped: 83 percent of U. S. industry employed physically handicapped persons; the number of employed handicapped persons skyrocketed over 1,000 percent between 1940 and 1945, from 27,600 to 300,000.

GOOD BUSINESS

Employers found that it was Good Business to hire disabled workers.

Surveys showed:

*They stay on the job. Their absenteeism, tardiness and turn-over records are strikingly better than those of the able-bodied.

To them a job is something to which they have looked forward, for which they have been specially trained. It is a chance to be independent. When placed on a job they are determined to make good.

*They have fewer accidents. Their handicaps make them careful, alert, and orderly.

One factor contributing to the mental blockage against their employment is the groundless fear of higher costs for workmen's compensation insurance. Rates for such insurance are no higher because handicapped workers are employed.

*They produce. Employers report that the handicapped workers are more conscientious about their work and often "from a production standpoint the quality and quantity produced by these people are better than those of normal people."

THEY EXPECT NO SPECIAL FAVORS

The physically disabled worker wants only an even break. He wants to be able to compete with other workers on the same basis: his ability to do the work. He expects no special favors.

TODAY

We are now approaching a time of full or near-full employment. Some experts believe we will have labor shortages even greater than during the war.

But today there are 85,000 disabled civilians and 214,000 disabled veterans on the active files of the United States Employment Service. An additional unknown number are probably looking for work but are not registered with USES. Despite handicaps these workers are immediately employable in jobs which stress their abilities rather than their disabilities. An additional 1,500,000 civilians are potentially employable with some rehabilitation.

Great strides have been taken. But much more needs to be done. More employers must overcome their own prejudice against employing handicapped workers -- civilians as well as veterans. The cost in money, manpower, productive energy and happiness due to unemployment of these workers is tremendous, and most of the cost is unnecessary.

HERE ARE SOME SUGGESTIONS FROM THE RETRAINING AND REEMPLOYMENT ADMINISTRATION

Whether they are small employers or large, whether in industry or agriculture, here are some steps employers can take when they're looking for help:

1. Review labor needs to determine which jobs can be done by handicapped persons. Very few jobs require the use of all faculties.
2. Match the job with the applicant. Emphasize abilities rather than disabilities.
3. Base decision as to the physical qualifications of a prospective employee on this question -- Can he do the work?
4. Cooperate with the various local, state, and federal agencies in the drive to publicize employment of the handicapped. Agencies playing leading parts in the drive are: United States Employment Service; Office of Vocational Rehabilitation; Retraining and Reemployment Administration; Veterans Administration; Disabled American Veterans; American Federation of the Physically Handicapped which sponsored the legislation for NEPH Week.

If you need further information about the program call Mr. William P. MacCahill, Retraining and Reemployment Administration, Department of Labor, Extension 755.

SOME JOBS HANDICAPPED WORKERS ARE NOW DOING

Studies indicate that the handicapped are employed in a variety of jobs: Amputees with artificial aids are employed as farmers, farm laborers, soil chemists, administrative assistants, information specialists, foresters, soil conservationists, assemblers, stock clerks, shoemakers, technicians, inspectors and teachers.

The blind are employed as drill press operators, sales clerks, and film inspectors. They can be employed in food processing plants in tasks that are repetitious or that require a delicate sense of touch.

Persons with arrested tuberculosis are employed as accountants, watchmakers, and laboratory technicians. They can be employed in most types of jobs in agriculture and other fields.

Persons with cerebral palsy are working at leather goods, as mechanics, and general office work.

Some epileptics are employed as draftsmen, bench workers, and farm hands.

Persons hard of hearing may be found in the labor market as carpenters, mechanics and stenographers.

THE WEALTH OF NATIONS

There are no financial yardsticks to measure the differences between a self-reliant citizen carrying his own responsibilities and a depressed citizen dependent upon charity. Those differences, however, mean more than dollars and cents in terms of happiness, good citizenship, and social usefulness.

The wealth of a nation lies not in its gold resources, but in its human assets. America can't afford to waste its wealth. We must make complete use of our manpower.

Digested by Office of Information, USDA, from material prepared by Retraining and Reemployment Administration, Department of Labor.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Office of Information

September 10, 1946

To: Bureau Information Heads

From: R. L. Webster, Acting Director

Subject: Program for the Employment of the Physically Handicapped

As a result of action by Congress and the President, the Government has launched a program to promote the employment of physically handicapped persons. The Department of Agriculture has been asked to assist in the program, particularly in connection with "National Employ the Handicapped Week," which President Truman has proclaimed for the week beginning October 6.

I am calling this to your attention because an important part of the program will be to bring information on it to employers in the field of agriculture.

The full use of all sources of manpower is vital not only to the individual worker but to the welfare of the nation as well. It is important therefore that both employers and the general public become more aware of this problem and support the efforts toward a proper solution of it.

Wartime experience has shown that practically every job can be performed by some handicapped worker; the great majority of persons who may be termed "handicapped" are handicapped only to the extent of being incapable of doing certain work, while remaining -- or capable of becoming -- able and skilled in many other jobs.

For instance, in agriculture and related activities, amputees with the aid of appliances can be successfully employed as farmers, farm laborers, administrative assistants, soil chemists, soil conservationists, information specialists, and foresters. Partially deaf persons can be employed in the same categories. All types of jobs in agriculture as well as in other fields are feasible for persons with arrested tuberculosis. Some epileptics are employed as farm hands. In food processing plants, blind persons with proper training can be used in jobs that call for repetitious operations, or that require a delicate sense of touch.

These jobs by no means exhaust the possibilities, but merely indicate them.

I hope you will find the opportunity to assist this program in your information activities. To help you, there is attached a digest of materials issued by the Retraining and Reemployment Administration. In the event you need more information, please call Mr. Henry Shepherd, USDA, Office of Personnel, Extension 5967, or Mr. William P. MacCahill, Retraining and Reemployment Administration, Department of Labor, Extension 755.

Additional copies of the accompanying digest may be obtained from the Distribution Control Unit (Extension 3511).

I should appreciate a report on the information assistance you give the program.

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